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THE OBLIGATION OF A Good Conscience TO CIVIL OBEDIENCE.

Being the substance of a *SERMON* Preached before the Judges, at the Assises held at *Huntington Aug.* 24. 1670.

By *John Meriton*, M. A. Vicar of *St. Ives* In the said County.

Contra rationem nemo sobrius, Contra scripturas nemo Christianus, Contra Ecclesiam nemo pacificus St. Aug. lib. 13. *de Trinitate.* } *senserit*

Principi summum rerum judicium Dij dederunt, subditis obsequij gloria relicta est, Tacitus lib. 6. *histor.*

LONDON

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THE OBLIGATION OF A Good Conscience IN CIVIL OBEDIENCE

To the READER.

What was lately ſounded in the ear is here preſented to the eye, word for word, without any enlargement of my notes, to make them ſwel in the Preſs, being unwilling to obtrude more upon the publick view from the Print-houſe, then what had approbation from the Pulpit, the hand that pointed my meditations to this ſubject, and induced me to make them publick, was love to peace and truth, and pity of the deſpicable condition of the multitude of thoſe which under the miſpriſion, or deluſion, or reſtiveneſs of Conſcience, dayly make ſhipwrack of faith and a good Conſcience, (in oppoſing themſelves to the lawfull commands of the higher Powers) and ſo run headlong into the Abyſs of Gods judgements in this world and in the world to come, (as Oxen to the ſlaugh-

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terhonſe, and Birds to the ſnare, not knowing or valuing that it is for their lives, if any reforme by hearing of their faults, I have gained a Soul, Jam. 5. v. 19, 20. *Brethren if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a ſinner from the error of his way ſhall ſave a ſoul from death, and ſhall hide a multitude of ſins.*

But if thereby he be the rather confirmed in them (for the ſame Sun which ſoftens wax hardens clay) however I have delivered my own Soul, Eze. 3. 19. *yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedneſs, nor from his wicked way, he ſhall dy in his iniquity but thou haſt delivered thy ſoul, which is all the deſigne of him who is (whether thou hear or forbear)*

Thine in all offices, of Charity and Service,



The Obligation of a good Conſcience, To Civil Obedience.

The Text Romans 13. verſe 5.

Wherefore ye muſt needs be ſubject not only for wrath, but alſo for Conſcience ſake.

IT was a good peice of policy, in the King of *Syria*; 1. *Kings* 22. 36. That commanded his thirty two Captains that they ſhould fight neither with ſmall nor great, ſave with the King of *Iſrael*.

He well knew that the generals fall would ſoon flat the courage, and rout the order of his Army; that I might uſe the like policie againſt that Champion which now bids defiance to all humane Authority and civil juriſdiction, *viz.* (Liberty of Conſcience) I have choſen this ſmooth ſtone out

of the brook of St. *Paul*, to throw at the head of this *Goliah*; who being once overthrowne, the rest of the *Philistines* may possibly disband themselves, and return to do allegiance and subjection.

The proposition that lyeth faire out of the words without violence or affectation is this. That every subject is under the Obligation of a good Conscience, to render obedience to the Civil power,

In the prosecution of this proposition I shall speake to these fower particulars.

1. Who they are that must be subject.

2. In what sence the Subject is under the Obligation of Conscience to obey.

3. Upon what account obedience to the Civil Power is a debt of Conscience.

4. Examine the influence of Conscience into Civil Obedience.

And then reflect upon the whole by way of use and Application.

And first, who they are that must be Subject; and they are of all Ranks, Orders, and Degrees of men.

Verse the first of this Chapter.

πᾶσα ψυχή, let every soul be subject to the higher powers, *viz. Cleros & laos*, Conclave, and Conventicle, Male and Female, Rich and Poore, High and Low, Bond and Free, even inferiour Magistrates themselves, who are as the *Centurion* in the Gospel, themselves under Authority, and they have others under them. For the very order of Nature infers an universal homage to one Supreame *viz.* A Sun in the Firmament, an Eagle in the

Air

Air, a Lyon on the Earth, and a *Leviathan* in the deep. Ἐπὶ πάσι ἴδιόν ἐστι διαφθεῖραι καὶ ἀφανίσαι· καὶ μαχοῖς· οὐχὶ τοῖς βασιλικοῖς μόνον, saith *St. Chrysostom* this exhortation let every ſoul be ſubject, is taught to Preiſts and Moncks: and not only to ſuch as are principally concerned with ſecular affairs, as well to all that give attendance at the Altar, as they that till the ground or grinde in the Mill, οὐδὲ γὰρ εὐσέβειαν ἡ ὑποταγὴ ἀναιρεῖ, *ſubjection enim iſta pietatem non evertit* ſuch ſubjection overturns not Religion; For outward Conformity to the poſitive Laws of Princes, offers not the leaſt injury to Piety, or violation to a good Conſcience; for obedience to humane Laws conſiſts not in inward aſſent or conſent to the matter of the Law or duty (and ſo leaves the Conſcience free and inviolable,) onely outward ſubjection is required to the power and Authority.

The Prince is *cuſtos utriuſque tabulæ*, and to pay him an imperfect obedience is to diminiſh his prerogative, and mutilate his power: indeed Cardinal *Bellarmine* urgeth that place *Heb.* 13. 17. obey them that have the rule over you; an exemption of Eccleſiaſtical perſons from the civil juriſdiction, to which Doctor *Andrew Willet* in his *Synopſis Papiſmi*, returns this anſwer, *viz.* That obedience there required is ſpiritual: of the Civil Magiſtrate and all ſecular perſons to the word of God; taught by the Paſtors of the Church, which is no exemption of them from their civil obedience. For as the Prince is bound to receive and beleive all true Doctrine which is taught by the Paſtors of the Church agreeable to the word of God, under pain

of damnation *John* 6. and last, he that beleives not is condemned already, the wrath of God abideth on him; so the Pastors of the Church are bound under the like pain, to obey the Princes Laws made according to the word of God; wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for Conscience sake, and it may be further answered, granting the obedience required from the Text alledged: to be Civil, that what part whatsoever of the Civil Jurisdiction; may be committed to the administration of Ecclesiastical persons no otherwise requires obedience then to the King as Supreame. 1. *Pet.* 2. 13. And to them only as put in authority under him for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of them that do well.

So that still the Prince is in all causes and over all persons, as well Ecclesiastical as Civil, head and Supreame: and his Kingdome ruleth over all; and so I pass to the 2d. particular, *viz.* In what sence the Subject is under the Obligation of Conscience to obey.

For answer to this particular, we need go no farthar then the first verse of this *Chapter*, where obedience is enjoyned to the higher powers. which word Power, is solely Obligatorie to the Conscience, where we must lawfully distinguish betweene the Soveraignty of the power, which renders things in themselves, for their matter and nature simply indifferent, necessarie to be obeyed; (and no otherwise, bindes the Conscience than in regard of Obedience due to Christian Magistrates, in lawfull things) and the matter and nature of the Laws enacted and enjoyned: which simply layes

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no Obligation upon the Conſcience: ſo that the Conſcience remains free and at liberty, as to the matter and nature of the Law, but bound and under Obligation in reſpect of the power; the poſitive Laws of Princes whether Civil, for the well ordering of the Commonwealth, or Eccleſiaſtical, for the well governing of the Church, (being good Laws) do binde in Conſcience in reſpect of contempt and diſobedience to the higher Powers (to whom providence has committed the management of ſuch afairs) but not in reſpect of the things commanded: which in their nature are indifferent.

As when the Magiſtrate for ſome profitable or Politick, or Religious end, commands a *Lent* to be kept, that is for ſome dayes abſtinence from Fleſh, it is not the eating or not eating of Fleſh, that ſimply diſpleaſeth and offends God, (and ſo binds the Conſcience) but the contempt of the Law, and wilfull and obſtinate diſobedience to the Magiſtrate, whoſe power of making Laws, and exacting obedience is of God, (by whom Kings Raign and Princes decree juſtice.)

For otherwiſe the uſe of the Creature is free and indifferent. Nor are the poſitive Laws of Men (which conſiſt not of things in their own nature neceſſary to ſalvation: (for ſuch can no Man make others than are contained in the Scriptures) but conſiſting of things in themſelves indifferent, nod otherwiſe neceſſary then as they bear the ſtamp and Impreſſion of the higher Powers, otherwiſe Obligatorie to the Conſcience, then as they imploy a Divine Obligation.

because the power whereby they are enacted is of God. So that the whole of the matter is this, *viz.* The Subject is under the Obligation of Conscience to obedience only in regard of the power; and so I pass to the third particular, *viz.* upon what account obedience to the Civil Power is a debt of Conscience.

St. *James* saith *Chap.* 4. *verse* 12. there is one Law-giver which is able to save and to destroy. He therefore can only make Laws to binde the Conscience that is able to save and to destroy (that is only God) so that the Laws of Princes by virtue of their deputation from God, and that Authority wherewithall from him they are vested, no otherwise hinder the Conscience than for Gods sake; which is the reason whereby the *Apostle* in the precedent verses of this *Chapter* enforces obedience to the higher powers: *verse* 1. for there is no power but of God: the Powers that be, are ordained of God. And *argumento à contrario*, if they that resist *verse* the 2d. receive to themselves damnation because they resist the ordinance of God, then they that obey become obedient, for Conscience sake, because the powers that be are ordained of God. There are three things here to be distinguished, Power, the means to obtaine it, and the use made of it: for though the means may be indirect, and the use irregular: those are the proper obliquities of the person, for which he must one day give account notwithstanding the power is of God, and for his sake must be obeyed *in omnibus licitis & honestis* not only for wrath but also for Conscience sake. Power however sub-

subjectively, objectively or terminatively humane, yet is originally Divine, the power in God and the Magistrate is the same only this difference, in God primitively and inhærent, in the Magistrate derivitively and adhærent, yet the power of the Magistrate because his substitution is Divine, is of the same stamp and impression: Magistrates are *Dei Vicarij*, Gods Deputy Lieutenant, Σὰι διάκονοι λειτουργοὶ *Dei Ministri* his Ministers they are of God, not as others, and ordinarie men, by Creation, but by Divine institution, and ordination, Magistrates so neerly resemble God as they are called by his name *Ps.* 82. 6. *ver. I have said ye are Gods*. God hath joyned the Magistrate with himselfe in the same Law of obedience and obligation, *Ezra* 7. 26. *ver.* and whosoever will not do the Law of thy God, and the Law of the King, let Judgment be executed speedily upon him: whether it be unto Death, or to Banishment, or to Confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

True it is, none can hinder the Conscience but God, so that we must take in God in the Magistrate and then commands of Magistrates which are lawfull by virtue of Gods power, wherewith they are vested, binde the Conscience for Gods sake, and so obedience to the higher Powers is a debt of Conscience because they are of God, his Ministers, wherefore ye must needs be subject.

Not only for wrath, but also for Conscience sake.

And so I come in the fourth and last place to examine the influences of Conscience into obedience. It ha's been a maxime amongst the wisest Legisla-

tors, that whoever would ſettle good Laws, muſt proceed in them with a ſtuffed opinion of all mankinde, and ſuppoſe that whoever is not wicked it is for want only of the opertunity, ſo that it is the oportunity of being evil that muſt be provided againſt, before the Prince or ſociety can be ſecure, which can no way be effected, but by the influence of Conſcience into Obedience. This is Dominions beſt, though not only wall, and bullwark; would men range no further than the limits of a good Conſcience void of offence towards God and towards Man, then might Princes diſband all jealoſies of conſpiracie againſt their power, or invaſion of their right, but might peaceably enjoy the portion of Dominion: and quietly exercife the virtue of their power, who otherwiſe perhaps muſt eate the bread of carefulneſs: and rule in feare; but God hath ſet his hedge about them, *viz.* to be obeyed not only for wrath: but alſo for Conſcience ſake which whoever breaks down doth what in him lyeth, to lay Dominion waſte, and expoſe Soveraignty to the prey.

For take away the obligation of Conſcience to obedience, & all government is meere uſurpation, Princes diadems hang upon their ſwords, and their Thrones ſtand deep in humane blood, the beſt Title to a Crown is the longeſt Sword, and the ſtrongeſt Arm. Kingdoms and Commonwealths are but ſocieties of Slaves and Vaſſals, and he that can free himſelf the ſooneſt is the beſt man, and he that can win a Crown may lawfully weare it, which principle moſt evidently proſtitutes the Diadem to the envie and emulation of every mans avarice, and

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ambition since however they may attempt and invade the Princes Territories, kill the Heir, and take possession they cannot be unjust or do any wrong, all which reasonings are the genuine wrecks of the shipwrack of Faith and a good Conscience. But whilest these *terræ Filij*, sons of *Adam*, are stretching forth their hands to offer violence to, and ravish that fruit which appears beautifull to the eye, the Angel of the Lord, *viz.* (the voice of a good Conscience) withdraws their Arm, tells them the fruit is forbidden and soe secures it from Rape, and violation.

(Touch not mine anointed) wast thou not afraid to lift up thine hand to slay the Lords Anointed? said *David* to that young man the *Amalekite*: whose own mouth betrayed him of the murder of a Soveraign 2 *Sam.* 1. 14. and of himself, when in the capacity of a Subject, though under the promise of the Crown, God forbid that I should stretch forth my hands against the Lords Anointed 1 *Sam.* 24. 6.

Divinity is circled in a Crown, and whoever with irreverend hands strikes at Majesty, by the same Act entitles himself a Traytor to God and Man; wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for Conscience sake.

And as Conscience is the Lifeguad of the power, so is it the Gaurdian of the Laws, for take away divine Obligation from humaen Laws, and their Obligation becomes indifferent and so renders their observance meerly prudent and expedient as may best comport with the Subects intereſt, humor, pride, or avarice, and then no man will

longer endure the yoke than it is too strong, or bear the burden then it is too heavy for him, nor can it be reasonably expected men should longer remain in Egypt, or *Babylon*, *viz.* (under the power of any Law) then they have opportunity to return, nor can any service be thought a freedom, till we are under the obligatories of Conscience to obey. And would the world but once be convinced that Magistrates, who are called Gods *Ps.* 82. 6. (because all government derives its power from God) inherit a jurisdiction over the Consciences of men, and that all their Laws: not contrarie to the Divine will, enacted by their power derived from him (by whom Kings reign, & Princes decree Justice are the sacred Image of his invincible power, which often punisheth such subtle and colourable crimes, as come not into the walke of humane Justice, then would the yoke of subjection become easie, and the burden of obedience light, then would the sword of the Civil power becausse the sword of the Lord, and of *Gidion* be prevented without being felt and obeyed without grudging.

And all commands of Magistrates not interfeeling with the precepts of God be as his, whose indeed as such they are) not grievious 1. *John* 5. 3. and his commandements are not grievious; wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for Conscience sake.

And so I come to reflect upon what hath been said by way of inference and application.

And this truth concerns it self with all ranks, orders and degrees of men, as they must fall under the capacity of power or subjection.

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I begin with the ſubjects in the words of *St. Peter* 1 *Pet.* 2. 13. ſubmit your ſelves therefore to every ordinance of Man, for the Lords ſake be not corrupted in your judgments, and ſo led out of the way of your duty and obedience, by every *ignis fatuus*, that pretends Conſcience, that great incendiarie of government and Laws) when as you have been taught as the truth is in *Jeſus*, that no pretence of Conſcience can juſtly abſolve you from that debt to the higher powers, which you ly under the obligation of good Conſciences to diſcharge, and be ye confident that Chriſtian liberty gives no man a diſpenſation to tranſgreſs or reſiſt the Civil power, and all thoſe of what perſwaſion ſoever, now abuſed, their liberty under the Goſpel, for Cloaks of nonconformity, maliciouſneſs or as occaſion to the fleſh to nouriſh the genuine brats of it, Faction, Schiſm, Strife, Debate Peviſhneſs or humor: ſhall one day poſſeſs the puniſhment of diſobedience, ſuffer as evil doers, and be led forth with the workers of iniquity.

For whoſoever reſiſts, ſhall receive to themſelves damnation. It is obſerved by ſome that St. *Paul* writ this Epiſtle to the Chriſtians at *Rome*, when *Nero* a great Enemy of the Chriſtian Religion ſate upon the Throne, under whoſe Tyranny the Faith of our Lord *Jeſus* was dayly in danger to have been baited at the fiery ſtake, Though it could not periſh in the flame. And if Obedience were a debt to the Civil power, when veſted in a Tyrant: how much the rather, when it is the poſſeſſion of a nurſing Father. If they that reſiſted the power of *Nero*, that graceleſs Monſter, merited damnation, what puniſhment

nishment are they worthy of, that speak evil of the dignity, despise the dominion, & affront the Soveraignty of a gracious Majesty, but that such clouds without water, may finde none in the lavor of the Gospel to wash of the guilt of their proud swelling words, but like raging waves of the Sea, may apear but to foame out their own shame, which no Handkircheif pretended from God can wipe away. I desire to be satisfied in this question, the Doctrine of St. *Paul*, was it of God, or of Man? I suppose none will presume to say of Man, because all believe he was an Apostle, and if of God, then all that deny the King his Supremacy under God, crying no King but *Jesus*, and under pretence of Christian Liberty urge a dispensation from the Civil power, do plainly erre, not knowing the Scriptures, or not savouring the things that be of God, for by the Doctrine of St. *Paul*, out of the Scriptures and undeniably of God all orders and degrees of Men owe obedience and subjection to the Civil power. wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for Conscience sake. Ah let not the dreams, and pretended revelations of every man, that calls himself a Prophet, prevaile against that more sure word of Prophecy, (*viz.* the Scriptures of the old and new Testament) 2. *Pet.* 1. 19. to which you do well to take heed, till the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. These are the latter dayes wherein evil Men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived, but beloved remember ye the words spoken of before, by the Apostles of our Lord *Jesus Christ* *Jude* 17. 1 *Tim.* 4. 1. 2. *Pet.* 23. that ye fall not from your stedfastnes, nor be made

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Merchandiſe of, through faigned words, and beguiled from the ſimplicity of faith as it is in Chriſt *Jeſus*.

I know there be many now engaged (under the miſpriſion of well meaning, though deluded Conſciences) with the multitude of thoſe that oppoſe themſelves, and for their ſakes it is, I have ſo long followed this exhortation that they may ſit down and conſider of the way they are in, and poſſibly recover themſelves out of the ſnare, before they receive the wages of their nonconformity, Schiſm, not to ſay Sedition. For *Moſes* his rod caſt upon the ground, will turn into a Serpent, and carries a ſting in the Tayl. Wilt thou not be afraid of the power, in which ſence give me leave to apply that of the Orator to *Mark Anthony Miror te Antoni quorum facta imiteris, eorum exitus non perhorreſcere.* I ſtand amazed they dread not the fearfull end of thoſe whoſe workes they imitate, *Jude* 11. wo unto them for they have gon in the way of *Cain* & ran greedily after the error of *Balaam* for reward, & periſhed in the gainſaying of *Core*. Prov. 24. 21. *My ſon feare thou the Lord and the King, and meddle not with thoſe that are given to change*, v. 22. *for their calamity ſhall riſe ſuddenly: & who knoweth the ruine of them both*; that is of God, & the King, of the King for he beares not the ſword in vain, of God, for he that reſiſts ſhall receive to himſelf damnation: ſo that in rendring obedience to the Civil power, you feare not him only, that can kill the body, but him alſo that can kill both body & ſoul, and caſt them into Hell fier: wherefore ye muſt needs be ſubject not only for wrath but alſo for Conſcience ſake: and ſo I paſs from all that ought to be ſubject to all that in any ſence beare rule, from the King as Supreame to all that are put in authority under him. That righteouſneſs may run down as a River, and Judgment as a mighty Stream: that the precious oyntment of miniſtering Juſtice, and executing

Judgement: may not wet *Moses* his head alone, but run down to the skirts of his clothing, and give me leave to bind this exhortation upon whom it may concern upon a threefold consideration.

1. The obligation of a good Conscience.
2. The conviction of gainsayers.
3. The peace, and security of the King and Kingdom: the Crown and Commonwealth.

1. The obligation of a good Conscience; the Magistrate must consider whose Minister he is as well as the Subject whose authority he hath, and then the same Conscience obliges the Magistrate to do justice, that bindes the Subject to obey.

If the Subject be under the Obligation of Conscience to obey: than he that resisteth (under pretence of Conscience) must receive to himself damnation, the Magistrate may pity his ignorance, or delusion, but must punish his sin, for he is the Minister of God, a revenger (and is under the Obligation of Conscience) to execute wrath upon every man that doth evil, and if there be a divine Obligation upon all humane Laws, (not contrarie to the divine will) then all that suffer for not obeying the Civil power (in all lawfull things) plainly suffer as evil doers, however they fondly hug their chains: and wildly boast of and glory in such sufferings; which shall one day appeare to their shame, but to the joy of such Magistrates as regard not the plea or accusation of their misguided Consciences, discharge their own in punishing their obliquities, not delaying Judgement or turning away the face of Justice. My Lords Right Honourable, and you worthy gentlemen in Commission of Peace, and all that possess any office in appertaining to Justice, whose daily, and continual care it should be, to see the wholsom Laws of the Realm duly executed. You must re-

resolve to listen more (and be obedient to the voice of your own Consciences, then to the clamours of offenders to what tribe or faction soever they belong.

Solomon saith he that observes the wind shall not sow *Eccl.* 11. 4. and the words, & raileries of Delinquents ought to have no better esteeme, but if any one will prostitute his Conscience to the Lady popularity, and not do her duty to be counted a moderate man, let me speake to him in the words of a late Reverend Prelate of this Dioces, *viz.* Bishop *Sanderson*, spoken upon the same occasion he makes an ill purchase for himself, that foregoes the least part of his Duty to gain a little popularity, the breath of the people being but a sorry plaister for a wounded Conscience, a good Conscience shall bestead you more then a thousand witnesses, and stand for you against ten thousand tongues in that day when the hearts of all men shall be made manifest, and every man shall have praise of God (having done well) whose Ministers you are so long as you do well, and are not afraid with any amazement, to execute wrath upon every man that doth evill, & so I pass to the second consideration, *viz.* the conviction of gainsayers, that will not know their error, but in the punishment, *Psal.* 50. 21. *whilst I kept silence:* wretches that turn grace into wantonness, Spiders that suck poison out of sweetness, interpreting delays of punishment, approbation of the crime. It is the demonstration of experience, that the fruit of indulgence, and suspension of Justice, is but the hardning the offender as the Sun doth clay, degenerate mankind being mostly of that mould, and therfore in all probability only capable of learning obedience by the things which they ought to suffer, and so I come to the 3d. and last consideration, *viz.* the peace and security of the King and Kingdom, that Magistrate that suffers any vice to grow, bears the Sword in vain, but he

he that suffers this, shall not long bear the sword at all, for it is contrary to the being of Power, as the Rainbow is opposite to the Sun.

It is notoriously evident that pretence of liberty of Conscience and immunity under *Christ*, from Temporal jurisdiction, is the only *Mush* that now troubles the waters of our peace & security, under the present settlement of the higher powers, and threatens with the tempest of a return to a miserable Anarchie and confusion, unless he be speedily thrown overboard, to prevent the shipwrack and allay the storm; That Cloud which is inauspiciously gathering (I had almost said) already formed, through the influence of indulgence to more formerly scrupulous then wisely tender Consciences, will ere long drop down in haile, and mildew, to batter the fortification of our present settlement; and blast, and wither all confidence of future expectation, unless by the zeale and courage of the present dispencers of judgement, and justice it be suddenly dissolved, and scattered, *Psal.* 106. 30. *and Phinehes stood up and executed judgement and the plague was stayed*, God grant these things may be timely considered, by whom they most concern, and I shall conclude all with that Collect of our Church Liturgie immediately after the ten Commandements in which I desire you all to joyn.

Almighty God, whose Kingdom is everlasting and power infinite have mercy upon the whole Church, and so rule the heart of thy chosen servant Charles *our King and Governour, that he knowing whose Minister he is, may above all things seek thy honour and glory, and that we & all his subjects duly considering whose authority he hath, may faithfully serve honour and humbly obey him, in thee and for thee according to thy blessed word and ordinance, through* Jesus Christ *our Lord, who with thee and the holy Ghost liveth and reigneth ever one God, world without end.* Amen.

FINIS.